

## Marks of a Sheep

Have you ever heard of a mission statement? Whether you have or haven't, the one thing I can guarantee you, is that if you have ever bought something from a company that doesn't have one, either verbal or written, you most likely walked away frustrated and disappointed.

**You see, a mission answers the question “What is the purpose of our business. It explains who the company is, what they do and where they're headed.”** *Without an idea of what a company is supposed to do, the employees would be lost or at least unmotivated because they wouldn't know why whatever they did mattered or had an affect on a big picture.* Even this congregation has a mission statement, it's to remind us why we're here!

In today's scripture we find Jesus giving us his mission statement. In verse 10, we find his promise of what we can expect from him. Why we need to follow him. The Good News translation says it this way, “I had come in order that you might have life – life in all its fullness.” Personally, I like the New Living Translation where Jesus explains, “My purpose is to give life in all its fullness.”

Unfortunately, many people read this and think of prosperity and success; we connect the fullness of life with things. We have to admit we'd be lying to ourselves if we deny it. All around us we see fullness or abundance and they are all connected with creature comfort, a good paying job, financial security.

But that's not what Jesus was offering. What Jesus is saying, when a person starts to follow Him, he or she has the real things of life that cannot be bought.

Think about it, money can buy a bed, but not sleep. Money can buy books, but not brains - a house, but not a home – the best doctor, but not health - a church building or cross to hang around your neck, but not a Savior. None of these things can buy you peace, purpose, destiny, the real purpose of living or the joy of facing death without fear and the possibility of handling affliction with a measure of confidence and assurance.

**In today's scripture Jesus said, “The sheep who respond - find abundant life.”** That's why Jesus says, “I am the Good Shepherd.” The shepherd... who comforts, who cares for, who is in love with and who knows His sheep.

**LET'S TURN OUR BIBLES BACK TO JOHN 10:1-15, 31-42.** Today we will look at principles that build on Jesus purpose of giving us life in all its fullness.

**In today's scripture, Jesus is still talking to the healed blind man, his neighbors the Pharisees. All the same people from chapter 9. Using an image anyone of his day could relate, Jesus spoke about a shepherd and his flock.**

### **1. This brings us to the first principle to having the abundant life Jesus offers. Who is your shepherd?**

Jesus starts by describing a sheepfold, Americans are not familiar with that term. It's a community pen where shepherds keep their sheep, and in this pen, there are several flocks and several shepherds!

- In life, we will hear about a lot of things we can follow, like all different kinds of religions or different things we can trust to provide us with an abundant life. **We can follow and trust in:** ourselves, our abilities, our possessions, our families, we can follow different religions or we can trust in Jesus as our Shepherd!

Here Jesus says, the sheep who respond to Him - find abundant life. That's why in verse 11 he says that he's the shepherd, the “**Good One**.” The Good one as compared to the faithless one. Jesus is the shepherd who comforts, cares for, is in love with and knows the sheep who follow Him!

He's the Good Shepherd because he gave His life for his sheep. Remember, the Story of the Good Shepherd isn't a tragic story about a victim, **but a tremendous story of a victor.** An explanation of One who chose to give His life for us.

Christianity is built on the work of Jesus Christ. In other words, when Jesus Christ hung on the cross, He hung as a substitute for the sinner. He hung in our place, on our behalf – ***No other religion has that claim!*** We deserved death because of our sin, but Jesus carried that sin and, in our place, He died and was resurrected. That's called the ***Substitutionary Atonement.*** Through that action we have the opportunity to become one with God.

We often overlook the fact, Jesus wasn't assassinated or entrapped in some sticky political web. He chose to die for us. **That's why in verse 11 Jesus said, He is the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep. He chose it for each of us personally!**

- *Jesus gave his life for you, that is the beauty of the Shepherd. The doorkeeper is the Holy Spirit allowing us access to a full, abundant and eternal life. But we have a choice whether or not we want to accept it.*

## **2. The 2<sup>nd</sup> principle - How do we know if we are one of God's sheep?**

It's not a secret or a mystery til the day you die! **You see each of us should have a point in our lives (even if we cannot put a date to it) where we can say in our mind when we agreed,** "Lord I accept your plan of salvation in my life. I recognize Jesus died and rose from the dead for me, I claim it *personally.* Forgive me and come into my life, come into my problems - I give you my heart.

*Notice I didn't mention church attendance, money, or good works... I intentionally left it out because they cannot be confused. Being a sheep is not something you earn! It's a gift you receive and Jesus holds out His offer to any person today who wonders if they are a sheep.*

**Now as a result of that decision, in Verses 27 – 29, you find four qualities that you receive if you're a genuine sheep.**

- **First of all, sheep are sensitive to the voice of God.**

Verse 27, My sheep recognize my voice.

Have you ever heard someone say "The Lord said to me..." or the "The Lord told me ..." **God does speak to people.** We don't necessarily hear an audible voice, but inside we hear God speaking.

**How does Jesus talk to us? Well, in many ways:** through the Holy Spirit, through sermons, devotionals, music, countless ways. Jesus does it primarily through His word – the Bible. This is no mere book. This is God's word -- the Bible and its purpose is to speak to you. That's what it's about.

I have had someone tell me, "*Well, I read my Bible; so why doesn't God ever speak to me?*" **Maybe it's because you're just not tuned in.** Think of a radio, you can buy the best radio, but if it isn't tuned to a station, you'll only get static.

In Luke 8:8 Jesus said, "*He who has ears to hear, let him hear!*" So if you've got ears, listen!" Often the Lord wants to speak to us, but we're tuned into a different frequency. **But God's sheep are tuned in to God.**

If you're not hearing God's voice leading you to obedience and direction. **There are 2 explanations. 1 -** You may have never been taught how to listen. **Or 2 –** it's very possible you have never become part of His flock.

In order to hear God speak, a person must want to hear God speak. We must desire it, be teachable, be receptive... be eager, ready to learn and open-minded to God. Many people don't hear God speak because

they're close-minded. **They don't want to consider the possibility, they could hear God speak. With closed minds and ears, God speaks and you miss it.**

- **Because the 2<sup>nd</sup> quality of a sheep is that they're obedient.**

Verse 27, they follow me. Jesus said my sheep hear me, they recognize my voice and as a result they follow me - their obedient. Jesus described those who were confused as being like sheep without a shepherd.

God speaks to the person who has decided in advance that they will do whatever God tells them. Whatever God says they respond: "Yes, Lord, whatever You say, I'm going to do it and if possible, I'll do it even before You tell me what to do."

When you decide in advance to do what God tells you to do. Then Jesus opens up His word. He opens up His life and you understand His will. John 7 Jesus said, "*He who wills to do My will shall know of the teachings which I speak.*"

The tragedy is that some who have a shepherd, but don't live like it – but that's a whole different issue. *It may very well be that your lack of obedience to the things of God, simply reveals that you're not in His family - think about it.*

- **And 3<sup>rd</sup>, my sheep are confident of their destiny.**

Verses 27 and 28, My sheep hear my voice, I know them and they follow me. And I give to them eternal life. **Meaning** - from the moment you receive Jesus Christ, you will have eternal life forever! That gives comfort, it provides the light at the end of the tunnel. From that point on your destiny is set.

Pastor Bill performed many funerals where the person who died was a believer in Jesus, but most at the funeral were not. The service turned into a time of the assurance of the belief. At the graveside he confirmed the message of assurance that when you know how to die, you really know how to live. There is a comfort knowing that to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord!

After the committal, one gentleman approached Pastor Bill and with all the gravestones surrounding us he said, "I'd give anything to have that kind of assurance." But he walked away rejecting it. **It wasn't a matter of not having the knowledge, it was a matter of not wanting to believe.**

- **4<sup>th</sup>, The sheep are secure.**

**Verse 28, no one is able to take them out of his hand and God is more powerful than anyone else!** Isn't that great! Not only eternal destiny, but right now in life they cannot be plucked away from God. No matter what problems a sheep faces or the struggles they endure, God is more powerful than anything or anyone else and has a plan that will be completed no matter the circumstances.

If you're not sensitive to hearing God, and really don't have that confidence that when you die your eternally destined... if you couldn't say that right now you're not in God's hand. **Then you have a choice to make.**

Forget going to church or who you're related to, forget your good works, But as you're before God right now ask yourself. *Have you given God the controls of your life?* **If you haven't then you're not a sheep.**

- **PRAYER**